

# Shaping a life in the country

It's hard to imagine this warm and cosy home in the heart of Whitemans Valley was once little more than a doss house for farm workers, a place to kick off the gumboots, hang the Swannndri, tie up the dogs and bed down after a long day. Today it's home to a family, **Jill Wild** reports.

## Latest House Values

### Wellington

Suburb	2 bdrm	3 bdrm	4 bdrm	5 bdrm
Aro Valley	\$421,000	\$484,000	\$558,500	-
Berhampore	\$342,000	\$488,000	\$554,500	-
Brooklyn	\$435,500	\$533,000	\$655,000	\$799,000
Mount Cook	\$382,000	\$502,000	\$589,000	\$349,500
Mount Victoria	\$408,000	\$679,000	\$870,000	\$1,183,000
Newtown	\$420,500	\$504,000	\$610,000	\$652,000
Oriental Bay	\$497,500	-	-	-
Roseneath	\$466,000	\$645,500	\$929,500	\$1,263,500
Te Aro	\$372,000	\$546,000	\$607,000	\$775,500
Wellington Central	\$324,000	\$515,000	-	-

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Median suburb values are based on E-Valuer, which calculates the estimated current market value for each residential property in the area using recent sales of nearby comparable properties.

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**Valley life:** The Edwards' house is one of four homes that cluster around the original farm homestead. They have now all been painted in similar styles and colours.

**T**HE RENOVATION, started in January this year, was the last and largest step for the Edwards family determined to create the home they had always wanted, and while finishing touches are still being made, the home has been transformed from its doss house days.

Gone is the mud outside the door, the yapping farm dogs on the chain, the muddy gumboots and dripping Swannndri, life now is one of simple but modern living.

But it's taken foresight and vision to get where they are today. In the depths of cold winters the roof leaked, the house was frigid from no insulation and Rachel Edwards admits there were times they thought life in suburbia might have been easier.

"But we moved out here for space, that was 13 years ago, the best things when we arrived were the new septic tank and the telephone and that was it. We bought it sight unseen. Well, we'd looked in the windows but the tenant wouldn't let us look in the house and when we arrived it was hideous, very run down and absolutely freezing."



**Rural scene:** The Edwards family can look out to the countryside when seated around the table for dinner.



# Dane's great love for Kiwi heritage

A Whitemans Valley villa has been restored to its former glory by a Denmark-trained architect who is passionate about preserving our architectural history. **Jill Wild** takes a tour to see what Mona Quinn has achieved.

**H**OW IRONIC that a Danish architect, who did almost her entire degree in architecture at Copenhagen's School of Architecture, wants to inspire New Zealanders to look at our old homes through more appreciative eyes in the hope our architectural history will not only be saved, but also actively restored.

Mona Quinn is now a true Kiwi, albeit with a strong Scandinavian accent, and she is passionate about architecture, with a special love for the old and a desire to save historic structures for generations to come. It is appropriate, then, that she and husband Richard bought a century-old villa in rural Whitemans Valley near Wellington as a project for restoration.

"It had been chopped around a bit," she says, mindful of the effort that previous owners had put into updating the villa.

"The porch had been filled in, the original windows had been removed and replaced with 1970s types, and an extension had been

added; the whole house was a bit tired."

It was a home that real estate agents promoted as a "handyman's dream", but Ms Quinn could see the potential.

"The difference between New Zealand and Denmark in terms of architecture school is that the Royal School of Architecture in Denmark prioritised flair, quality and style while in New Zealand, where I did my last year, the learning was not only on design but also practicality and how to put a build together. I was privileged to study at both schools."

While Ms Quinn was convinced of the potential, family members were less confident.

"You are absolutely crazy," was the general reaction and even worse, stern silence, she recalls.

"On that note, we set to work – talked to the right builder, found the right detailer in Westport, the right glass in Hamilton and the perfect door in Masterton. A 100-year-old lady deserves and



**Enthusiast:** Denmark-trained architect Mona Quinn is passionate about old New Zealand villas.

needs proper preparation before powder and makeup."

Ms Quinn used the project to test her beliefs and trial concepts, but the budget allowed no margin for frivolities.

"We didn't have the money to buy original native timber scotias and architraves so, because I knew we were going to paint the interior, I took patterns, and used cheaper materials made in the same design."

Once painted white, it was impossible to tell the new from the old, but where the original wood was left as a feature, Ms Quinn spent hours searching the country to match features with recycled pieces of the same design and wood.

"I've always liked period buildings. We lived in a Chapman Taylor house in Chatsworth Rd before moving here and I do think period buildings do well in relationship to the street and surrounds. In modern New Zealand



**Elegant home:** The Whitemans Valley villa after a Mona Quinn-designed and managed makeover. Photos: STEVE ALLSOP PHOTOGRAPHY

architecture, that relationship can be lost. I'd like to reintroduce a connection of house and street relating to each other again. I see restoring period buildings as a way of starting that conversation."

According to Ms Quinn, the Whitemans Valley villa was once at the heart of the valley's rural social life, a place where high-society tennis parties were held and high teas enjoyed. A swimming pool, added at some stage, has been removed, but the original surrounding farm cottages remain and are a part of the family's long-term restoration project.

"The house sits well in the landscape with the surrounding cottages. We restored the main house first, always knowing we'd turn one of the cottages into my studio."

The matai floors are now a feature, the walls have been relined with plasterboard, and the walls, ceiling and underfloor insulated.

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**Wonderful workspace:** The kitchen is light and bright, vastly different to the original.



**In need of love:** The villa before the renovation.



**Beautiful:** The decor is continued into the bathroom, where old fits comfortably with a new handbasin.



**Built-in features:** Architect Mona Quinn paid much attention to detail on the renovation.